

TOP SECRET SENSITIVE

17 December 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Morning Meeting of 17 December 1969

25X1
25X1
[Redacted]
[Redacted] The
Director asked the DDCI to arrange for the briefing at his own convenience.

Godfrey briefly commented that it appears Italian President Rumor has postponed his visit here until sometime after the first of the year.

Godfrey provided the Director with a few copies of a recently completed memorandum, "Sino-Soviet Relations," and the DD/I noted its substantial dependence on CS reporting.

D/ONE reported that in response to State's initiative efforts are under way to expedite deliberations on the Estimate Short-term Prospects for Libya.

D/ONE briefed on the request of DOD/ISA for an Estimate. After some discussion the Director indicated that a memorandum to DOD rather than an Estimate would be appropriate.

DD/S briefed on the results of five showings of the Agency film, "A Need to Know." Noting the possibility that the music may be poor and the sound track not in complete synchronization, the Director asked D/ONE to view the film once again.

Carver briefed on a request from the EOB for a briefing on infiltration before some scientific panel. The Director asked the DD/S&T to clarify the purpose of the briefing and the nature of the panel.

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Carver and the Director noted Joe Alsop's column in today's Washington Post, "Rise in Enemy Infiltration Points Up Risk in War Policy," and a brief discussion followed.

25X1 [] reported that C/FE's session with Congressman Mahon yesterday went well.

25X1 [] noted that according to Ed Braswell there is some possibility that our retirement legislation may be considered by the Senate before 1 January. DDCI observed that the related briefing papers are in hand.

Bross highlighted a paper [] The Director asked that it be sent to Dr. Kissinger and Deputy Secretary Packard.

DD/S&T reported on a conference he attended yesterday and went on to suggest that Lieutenant General J. M. Philpott, Deputy Director of DIA, visit us for a briefing.

25X1 []
DDCI called attention to a matter pertaining to the ROK Marine Corps.

DDCI reported that he will be speaking before the Naval Academy Alumni Association.

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*The Director asked the DD/I to take a look at the foreign affairs section of the 19 December issue of Time magazine and to flag for him anything of particular import in terms of our intelligence on the matters covered.

[]
L. K. White

*Extracted and sent to action officer

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Joseph Alsop

Rise in Enemy Infiltration Points Up Risk in War Policy

IT IS vital to understand the nature of the risk that the President has chosen to accept, as indicated by his latest brief speech on Vietnam. To be blunt, the risk is that he will have to widen the existing limits of the war.

With much heavier emphases, he has now said once again that he is perfectly ready to do this, if the situation requires it. He has quite rightly refrained from saying how he will do it—whether by partially reversing President Johnson's bombing decisions, or in some other way. But the fact should be faced that the President means business about this, and that the risk is quite real.

The risk is real, in turn, because of the greatly increased flow of North Vietnamese troops to the war fronts in the south. Very wisely, the President forthrightly warned the country of this augmented invasion (misnamed "infiltration"), although he had so recently cast doubt upon it in his press conference.

The seeming contradiction between the press conference and the speech is very easy to clear up. In brief, measuring the troop flow out of North Vietnam and down the Laos trails has always been a complex, highly sophisticated and very difficult task. After the President's Nov. 3 speech, but before the press conference, there began to be clear indications of a much augmented troop movement.

THIS WAS very bad news indeed for the people in the administration who put home politics first and an honorable war-outcome a long way second. Furthermore, any serious change in any one of a long list of factors is capable of radically altering the total measurement of troop movement. For a very brief period,

moreover, there was such a change.

This change was therefore seized upon as proof that the size of the whole troop movement was being greatly exaggerated. The President was momentarily convinced. In his press conference, therefore, he spoke of "inflation" of the troop movement. But now he has had plain proof that there was no inflation, and quite properly, he has therefore told the country about this major new development.

Even now, however, there is a sharp argument within the government about the new development's dimensions. The simplest yardstick is the number of new North Vietnamese troops that will be ready to join the fighting in the south by the end of January—which is the time to watch for an offensive spasm by the enemy.

The seeming-authoritative estimates actually range from a total of about 40,000 reinforcements in-country by that time, to as high as 70,000. Either way, a spasm has to be expected. But if the second figure proves to be correct, there will be a major offensive spasm. And since there will be a lot more fighting, there will be a correspondingly sharp increase in all rates of loss, including U.S. losses.

IF THAT happens, presumably, the President will do something pretty rough, to turn the tables on Hanoi. He cannot avoid doing something rough, in fact, unless he wishes Hanoi and the world to conclude that he has been indulging in empty bluster.

Furthermore, alas, it is only prudent to anticipate that the enemy's planned spasm will be major in scope. Before any agonizing reappraisal of their war policy, the war planners in Hanoi have always been bound to put the President to at least one acid test. This is what now seems to lie ahead; and this is also why the risk is real that the President will end by having to widen the limits of the war.

The question remains, of course, whether this was the right risk to accept. There were those in Washington, and above all in Saigon, who argued that it was better for the President to show Hanoi he meant business in quite another way — by deferring, or at least by greatly reducing, the troop withdrawal that he also announced in his short speech.

For obvious reasons, this, too, had its risks. The risk at home, moreover, was on the whole rather less than the risk in Vietnam, where it is super-important to prove that Vietnamization will work. Retreat under threat of an enemy offensive would have made the

new program seem a mere fair-weather policy to all Vietnamese, including the Hanoi war planners.

The benefits will be immense, per contra, if the new program can be shown to work despite greatly augmented North Vietnamese reinforcements, plus a major enemy offensive. Reportedly, General Creighton Abrams is quite confident that the expected offensive spasm can be successfully dealt with, even if it is on a big and costly scale.

These, then, were the reasons the President chose one kind of risk instead of the other kind. And these reasons, in turn, are enough to indicate the real gravity of his choice.

Los Angeles Times